

With James's support and my newfound conviction, I approached the second day of the conference not as the wide-eyed innocent of yesterday but as a potential future leader. The urge to speak out, to give voice to all of those whom society silenced hummed in my veins. The only remaining question was how.

Among the morning's speakers was my old friend from St. Louis, Virginia Minor. After she was introduced, Mrs. Minor wasted no time in getting to the point of her speech. "You may know that my husband and I are vocal proponents of the idea that the Constitution already gives us the right to vote. But we are willing to put before you an additional piece of supporting evidence, found in the Fourteenth Amendment, that I believe gives all *women* the right to vote.

"As persons born in the United States, women are citizens. Nowhere in the text does it specify 'males' or 'men,' only 'persons,' which is a term without gender and therefore should include both men and women. The Constitution gives all *citizens* the right to vote. Therefore, as citizens, we already have the right to vote. The next line of the amendment elaborates, noting that no state is allowed to legally deprive citizens of their rights or deny them equal protection."

I followed Mrs. Minor's words closely, taking in each argument and dissecting it carefully. I was not trained to debate the finer points of law, but I could find no flaw in the woman's logic. In fact, the longer I listened, the more I found myself agreeing. Around us, women whispered to each other, nudging husbands and companions in agreement with Mrs. Minor's peaceful call to arms.

"Therefore, if the right is already ours, all we need do is take it back. Yes," her voice rang out like the peal of an Easter church bell, "I mean we must take action. Perhaps you have heard of the Spiritualist town of Vineland, New Jersey? There, late last year, nearly two hundred

women cast their votes. They pledge to do so annually until they are acknowledged. This is what I call on you to do.

“What I am asking of you is revolutionary, this I know. It goes against all we are raised to believe and how society demands we behave, but I urge you to open your minds to the idea. As a group, we have the power to change state laws, something which Miss Anthony, Mrs. Stanton, and other leaders of this group will be working to put into action. But each of us bears personal responsibility as well. So on your next election day, I ask that you hand over your ballot, not meekly but with pride, and demand to be counted among the citizens of this fine country. Only in that way can we hope to affect change in time to cast our votes for the next president in 1872.”

The crowd roared with applause, and I leapt to my feet, clapping as loud as my hands would let me. This woman was onto something.

“We should do this,” I mouthed to Tennie, who nodded enthusiastically. I would have to discuss the possibilities taking shape in my mind with James.

“They’ve got motivation now,” said a man in the row behind me. “Too bad they don’t have the money to see it through.”

His offhand comment snagged my attention. The party needed money, and I needed a way into its upper echelons. If Josie’s stock tips had taught me anything, it was that there was money to be made in the stock market—lots of it. Perhaps that could be my entry into suffrage society. I mulled over the thought as other people spoke. By the time Elizabeth Cady Stanton delivered the closing address, I was determined to work with Tennie to see how our budding business relationship with Mr. Vanderbilt might help advance our work for women.

When Mrs. Stanton said, “The need of this hour is a new evangel of womanhood to exalt purity, virtue, morality, true religion, to lift man up into the high realms of thought and action,” a chill raced down my spine. Those words were meant for me.

My sight blurred, and I blinked as a vision took over my consciousness. I stood in the center of a spotlighted stage, speaking to throngs larger even than the crowd gathered for this convention, as Demosthenes had promised.

A flash, then I sat on a platform next to the three Fates who ran the organization. I was the golden child sent to breathe new life into a movement desperately in need of new energy.

The next thing I knew, Miss Anthony was announcing me as president of the National Women’s Rights Convention.

Another shift and the vision began to fade, but not before a newspaper headline blared the fulfillment of the highest of Demosthenes’ prophecies: “Victoria Woodhull Makes History as First Woman President.”

*Yes! I will bring this movement to the masses. I will show them that a woman like them, raised in the dirt, who works for a living, can be an agent of change. Then they shall see one Victoria sitting on the throne of England while her namesake guards the interests of women in the United States. Less than four years from now, I shall be president.*